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# Texas Department of Health

## The Commissioner's Report to the Board of Health

April 3, 2003

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## **Hot Topics**



### **Legislators to get packets on West Nile virus**

TDH is developing a information packet about West Nile virus for state legislators, leadership, and others in state government to educate them about disease prevention, transmission, and symptomology, and to refer them to authoritative online resources for additional information. The packet will enable its readers to provide their constituents with the most up-to-date information on the West Nile virus. *For more information, contact Marsha Canright, Office of Communications, at (512) 458-7400 or e-mail [marsha.canright@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:marsha.canright@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Events being planned for Public Health Week**

The Office of Communications is coordinating events for Public Health Week, April 7-11. Each day focuses on one of the agency's five priorities: business improvement, nutrition and physical activity, bioterrorism, health disparities, and immunization. Through a mix of banners, exhibits, and organized physical activities, the week acknowledges the work of dedicated public health employees and demonstrates some of the materials and tools used to educate TDH's constituencies on each priority area. The spotlight event is a presentation by Georges Benjamin, bioterrorism expert and president of the American Public Health Association, who will discuss public health's role in defending against bioterrorism during a brown-bag luncheon at TDH on Wednesday. *For more information, contact Marsha Canright, Office of Communications, at (512) 458-7400 or e-mail [marsha.canright@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:marsha.canright@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Nearly 2,200 vaccinated against smallpox as Texas revises disqualifications**

Texas is not postponing smallpox vaccinations of public-health-system and hospital personnel, but is adding several cardiovascular conditions and risk factors to the list of health conditions that disqualify individuals from the voluntary vaccination program. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are investigating whether there is an association between smallpox vaccinations and reports of heart problems in seven health-

care workers (none from Texas) who had been vaccinated; two of the health-care workers died. TDH has notified vaccinators in Texas that vaccinations should not be given to persons with known underlying heart disease such as cardiomyopathy, congestive heart failure, angina, and previous myocardial infarction, with or without current symptoms. Others who should not receive smallpox vaccinations are those individuals with three or more of the known major risk factors for cardiovascular disease: hypertension, elevated cholesterol or low HDL, diabetes, or smoking. Last week, CDC also announced that vaccinees should be told that myopericarditis, an inflammation of the heart, may be a potential complication of the vaccination.

Through March 28, some 2,186 members of public health responses, hospital-based medical-care employees, and federal employees in Texas have been vaccinated in Phase I of the smallpox vaccination program. Vaccinations in Texas began Feb. 13. *For more information, contact Dennis Perrotta, Office of the State Epidemiologist, at (512) 458-7219 or e-mail [dennis.perrotta@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:dennis.perrotta@tdh.state.tx.us), or Linda Chambers at (512) 458-7219 or e-mail [linda.chambers@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.chambers@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Texas data being entered into smallpox Pre-event Vaccination System**

The smallpox Pre-event Vaccination System (PVS), a secure web-based system administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, captures information on vaccine batches, organizations involved in the campaign, and demographic and other information on vaccinees, including their vaccine take response. Information on Phase 1 vaccinees is being entered into the system. The system will eventually include a number of public health reports, such as a report that lists members of the response teams, the number of vaccinations by organization, and vaccinations by vaccine lot. Data in PVS may be linked to data in the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) to provide incidence rates for smallpox vaccine adverse events.

The Immunization Division of the TDH Surveillance and Epidemiology Program gathered the necessary information from the regions for PVS deployment in Texas: names and addresses of organizations (TDH regional offices, local health departments, and hospitals) involved in the vaccination campaign, names and contact information for individuals identified as PVS users, and the names of the vaccinators and take evaluators. This information was compiled and sent to CDC to load into PVS prior to deployment. Information was collected on 370 organizations and about 900 staff throughout the state. On Feb. 17, the first wave of PVS users were able to apply for digital certificates from CDC's Secure Data Network to access the system. Regional and local health departments throughout Texas have now started to use PVS as they implement their smallpox vaccination campaign. *For more information, contact Julie Townsend, Immunization Division, Surveillance and Epidemiology Program, at (512) 458-7284 or e-mail [julie.townsend@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:julie.townsend@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Texas reports 3 cases of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 85 suspected cases of severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, in 27 states are under investigation in the United States. Three of the suspected cases, all adults, are from Texas. Two had traveled, separately, to Hong Kong, and one had been to Singapore. One is from Harris County, another from Collin County, and the third is a resident of Lubbock County but has not

been in that county since becoming ill and being treated in Harris County. None of the three is hospitalized.

TDH officials said no secondary cases have been reported and that there is no indication of an increased risk of illness for the general public. They said current information about SARS indicates that spread of the illness is through respiratory droplets or fluids in situations of direct or close contact. More information about SARS is available at [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars). CDC updates a state-by-state web listing of suspected case counts each workday by 4 p.m. CST. *For more information, contact Neil Pascoe, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Influenza loosens grip on state**

Influenza activity in Texas last week was classified as “sporadic,” marking the second week in a row that activity had fallen below the “regional” and “widespread” levels, which had characterized flu activity in the state since early November. Influenza is not reportable in Texas, but TDH relies on a series of surveillance sites around the state to monitor the level of activity and identify the types of the flu virus circulating. “Sporadic” means that scattered cases occurred, but that there were no known outbreaks. *For more information, contact Neil Pascoe, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **West Nile virus hit 213 of state’s 254 counties in 2002**

TDH is reporting 203 human cases of West Nile in 38 Texas counties in 2002. The last human case became ill in November. There were 12 deaths: five from Harris County, two from Dallas County, and one each from Hood, McLennan, Nueces, Randall, and Tarrant counties. Of the 203 human cases, 104 were in Harris County. Twenty-seven became ill in July, 81 in August, 65 in September, 25 in October, and five in November. The virus was detected in humans, birds, mosquitoes, or horses in 213 of Texas’ 254 counties. The only confirmed 2003 Texas case of West Nile virus was a horse in Calhoun County. *For more information, contact Joe Garrett, Zoonosis Control Division, at (512) 458-7255 or e-mail [joe.garrett@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:joe.garrett@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **\$81.6 million expected in bioterrorism funds**

Last year, TDH received \$51.4 million from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as \$8.3 million from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). This year, TDH will receive approximately \$48.3 million from CDC and \$33.3 million from HRSA, for a total of \$81.6 million. The small reduction in the CDC funds results from the movement of the National Pharmaceutical Stockpile (now known as the Strategic National Stockpile), and the money set aside for required planning, to the Department of Homeland Security. Currently, our understanding is that a Memo of Understanding will be written between Homeland Security and CDC to restore that money; the end result will be an estimated \$2-3 million forwarded to TDH for the Strategic National Stockpile initiative. TDH will tentatively receive the CDC guidance for application of funds by April 15, 60 days before the application is due; the HRSA guidance is tentatively scheduled for release to the states on March 31, also with a 60-day turnaround for submission of the application. *For more information, contact Dennis Perrotta, Office of the State Epidemiologist, at (512) 458-7219 or e-mail [dennis.perrotta@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:dennis.perrotta@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Conferences on West Nile virus held in recent weeks**

TDH's Zoonosis Control Division has been holding four regional conferences on the West Nile virus to provide public health professionals with the latest information on the virus in Texas including its history, epidemiology, disease aspects, vector and virus surveillance, and mosquito control. The conferences, jointly sponsored by TDH and the Texas Public Health Training Center with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Health Resources and Services Administration, were held March 20-21 in Fort Worth, March 27-28 in Odessa, March 31-April 1 in San Antonio, and April 3-4 in Houston. *For more information, contact Eric Fonken, Zoonosis Control, at (512) 458-7255 or e-mail [eric.fonken@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:eric.fonken@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Texas HIV Medication Program exploring funding alternatives**

The Board of Health heard proposed rules on Feb. 27 regarding changes in the financial eligibility criteria for the Texas HIV Medication Program. The board tabled the proposed rules and instructed TDH to come up with a plan and strategy to address the proposed shortfall without removing clients from the program. Staff is working with the board and with TDH executive management to seek alternative methods to fund budgetary needs for the program. *For more information, contact Linda Moore, HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505 or e-mail [linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Binational TB Card introduced**

The Binational TB Card was introduced at a press conference in El Paso on March 27. The Border Health Commission convene the meeting. Speakers came from both Mexico and the United States. The card will be used as a pilot project in El Paso/Juarez/Las Cruces, San Diego/Tijuana, and one district each in the interior Mexican states of Michoacan, Jalisco, Veracruz, and Oaxaca. *For more information, contact Ann Tyree, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [ann.tyree@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:ann.tyree@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Events planned for 2003 National Infant Immunization Week**

The observance of National Infant Immunization Week will occur April 13 through April 19. Regional offices, local health departments, local immunization coalitions, and many immunization community partners are planning a series of events across the state. The Immunization Division has a list of activities in which interested organizations can participate, and has been available at [www.ImmunizeTexas.com](http://www.ImmunizeTexas.com) since March 21. *For more information, contact Vivian Harris, Communication and Training Program, Immunization Division, at (512) 458-7284, ext. 6420, or e-mail [vivian.harris@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:vivian.harris@tdh.state.tx.us).*

## **Disease Outbreaks and Investigations**



### **North Texas shigellosis outbreak investigated**

TDH staff has been assisting a local health department in North Texas with its investigation of a shigellosis outbreak that occurred between December of 2002 and the end of February 2003. The TDH laboratory has identified two different strains of *Shigella sonnei* in stool specimens from 18 ill persons in the outbreak. It is not yet known whether there were different risk factors for infection with the two different strains or if both



strains might have been present in the gastrointestinal tract of at least some of the ill persons. *For more information, contact Linda Gaul, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Fish served at medical conference suspected in ciguatera toxin poisoning**

TDH staff has been working with a local health department to investigate an outbreak of ciguatera toxin poisoning among attendees of a medical conference on Feb. 19. All of the 18 ill persons consumed the same fish served at a dinner prepared for the conference. As there is no laboratory test for clinical specimens and there is no leftover food for testing, the clinical diagnosis is being used to confirm the diagnosis of the agent that caused the outbreak. All ill persons have recovered. *For more information, contact Linda Gaul, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Children who ate partially cooked meats suffering from gastroenteritis**

An outbreak of gastroenteritis among a group of church members is under investigation by TDH staff, working with a local health department. All of the ill persons are children, one of whom developed hemolytic uremia syndrome, was hospitalized, and had a stool specimen that tested positive for *E. coli* O157. Three other ill children with similar symptoms ate some of the same foods as the culture-confirmed ill child. The implicated food items are hamburger meat and chicken. Church staff members purchased the meats and other foods and then partially cooked them. The partially cooked foods were distributed to various households, and persons in the households did the final cooking of the food items. The consumption dates were different for different households. TDH is still collecting data and trying to obtain more clinical specimens for testing. *For more information, contact Linda Gaul, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Invasive meningococcal disease targets two middle-schoolers in Bryan**

Two cases of invasive meningococcal disease were confirmed in Brazos County. The two cases were both 6th-graders at Sam Rayburn Middle School in Bryan. The first onset was Feb. 26 and was confirmed to be serogroup B. The second onset was March 2 and was confirmed to be serogroup B as well. At that point, the decision was made to prophylax all 6th-graders at Sam Rayburn Middle School. Presently, no additional cases have been reported. *For more information, contact John Walker, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail [john.walker@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:john.walker@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **TB cases decrease by 5.7 percent from 2001 to 2002**

During 2002, the TB Elimination Division received reports of 1,550 cases of tuberculosis for Texas residents, a 5.7 percent decrease from the 1,643 cases reported for 2001. Harris County, including the city of Houston, reported 416 cases, Dallas County 243, Tarrant County 109, Hidalgo County 77, Bexar County 71, El Paso and Travis counties both 65, Cameron County 61, Webb County 38, and Nueces County 20. The rate, expressed as cases per 100,000 population, is 7.2 for Texas statewide and 18.5 for Webb County, 17.4 for Cameron County, 12.8 for Hidalgo County, 11.9 for Harris County, 10.6 for Dallas County, 9.3 for El Paso County, 7.7 for Travis County, 7.3 for Tarrant County, 6.2 for Nueces County, and 5.0 for Bexar County. *For more information, contact Gail Shevick, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [gail.shevick@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:gail.shevick@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Central Texas rabies cases on the rise**

Between Jan. 1 and March 14, Region 7 Zoonosis Control investigated 80 cases of rabid animals, or 33 percent of the 271 rabies cases investigated during all of 2002. One case was reported in each of the following counties: Bastrop, Bosque, Burleson, Milam, Mills, San Saba, and Williamson. Two each were reported from Coryell, Grimes, and Leon counties. Brazos County reported three cases, and four cases each were reported from Bell, Freestone, Limestone, and Robertson counties. Hill County reported five cases, McLennan seven, Washington nine, and Fayette 10. With 17 rabies cases, Lee County has experienced a significant increase since 2002, when it reported three cases total, and 2001, when it had none. Local authorities have initiated a media campaign to increase public awareness and promote rabies prevention.

Bell County has recorded four skunk-related rabies cases in the first quarter of 2003, more than in the entire year of 2002. Bell County Health Department and animal-control agencies in Bell County were alerted of the rabies increase and of the communities involved. Spillover cases from rabid skunks infected a horse in Bell County, two dogs in Brazos and Hill counties, two cats in Limestone and Robertson counties, a cow in McLennan County, and a San Saba County goat. *For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix, Zoonosis Control, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2451, or e-mail [beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us).*

## **Conferences, Seminars, Work Groups, and Trainings**



### **Conference gives tips to public on maintaining healthy weight**

The Promoting Healthy Weight in Texas Conference was held Feb. 13-14 in San Antonio to increase awareness of the obesity problem in Texas and to roll out the strategic plan for the prevention of obesity in Texas. Three hundred participants attended, including health-care professionals and school staff, who were welcomed by Commissioner Sanchez. A news conference held at the conference site on Feb. 13 brought in reporters from three network-affiliated television stations, two newspapers, and three radio stations. *For more information, contact Barbara Keir, Bureau of Nutrition Services, Public Health Nutrition and Education, at (512) 458-7444, ext. 2144, or e-mail [barbara.keir@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:barbara.keir@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Annual conference deals with issues concerning adult sex offenders and victims**

The 11th annual Conference for Treatment and Supervision of the Adult Sex Offender was held from Feb. 27 to March 1 in Dallas for about 215 attendees from various disciplines including probation, parole, treatment providers, polygraph examiners, and legal officials. The conference addressed offender assessment and treatment issues, victim issues, the use of polygraphs, family reunification, ethics, and the treatment of diverse populations. The keynote speaker was Kim English, who is responsible for the direction and management of the Office of Research and Statistics for the Division of Criminal Justice in the Colorado Department of Public Safety. The conference was sponsored by the Council on Sex Offender Treatment and co-sponsored by the Correctional Management Institute of Texas of Sam Houston State University, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, and the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services. *For more information, contact Allison Taylor, Division of Professional Licensing and Certification, at (512) 834-4530 or e-mail [allison.taylor@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:allison.taylor@tdh.state.tx.us).*





### **600 teens converge for second annual Youth Leadership Conference**

Region 11's Office of Tobacco Prevention and Control staff participated in the second annual Youth Leadership Conference on Feb. 28 at Abundant Grace Church in Edinburg, attended by about 600 high-school students from Cameron, Willacy, Starr, and Hidalgo counties. Topics included leadership skills, self-advocacy, communication skills, and other life skills that focus on teens becoming more effective leaders in our communities. In addition to serving on the planning committee since September 2002, Dora del Toro, regional coordinator with the Office of Tobacco Prevention and Control, provided three sessions on leadership in tobacco prevention. The conference was a collaborative effort by TDH, Buckner Children and Family Services, the Cameron County Housing Authority, the Career Tech Institute, the Hidalgo County Juvenile Probation Department, the Horizon Youth Center, the McAllen Weed and Seed Initiative, Planned Parenthood, Region 1 Education Service Center, MET Inc., the San Benito Housing Authority, the Texas Cooperative Extension, the Texas National Guard, the Association of Retarded Citizens of Texas, A.V.A.N.C.E. – Rio Grande, and the numerous youth volunteers. *For more information, contact Dora del Toro, Office of Tobacco Prevention and Control, Region 11, at (956) 423-0130, ext. 588, or e-mail [doradel.toro@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:doradel.toro@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Nearly 5,000 registered for today's teleconference on kids' fitness**

A seven-hour teleconference, "FIT-Kids! On the Road to Excellence," is being broadcast today, April 3, to an audience of 4,636 registered participants. The teleconference is the product of a workgroup comprised of WIC nutritionists from TDH as well as WIC nutritionists from the other four states and the two tribal WIC program nutritionists in the USDA Southwest Region and led by Sondra Ralph of the USDA. Aimed at anyone working with preschool children and their families and using a combination of dynamic speakers and video vignettes, the teleconference will address myths and realities of everyday health, fun fitness for every body, the art of persuasion, secrets of healthy feeding relationships, helping children make better TV choices, effective ways to talk about weight concerns, and current medical treatments for overweight children.

Commissioner Sanchez is being shown in a pre-recorded interview videotaped at TDH on Feb. 14 for this teleconference, which is going to 218 downlink sites in 28 states, with 36 downlink sites in Texas alone. The teleconference was produced and is being broadcast by the TDH bureaus of Nutrition Services and Support Services. *For more information, contact Linda Brumble, Bureau of Nutrition Services, at (512) 341-4400, ext. 1-2269#, or e-mail [linda.brumble@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:linda.brumble@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Regional staff, primary-care physicians get training in traumatic brain injury**

The Texas Traumatic Brain Injury Project has delivered seminars in seven TDH regions over the past year. The seminars are designed to help case managers better understand their clients with traumatic brain injury and to help find resources to serve the individuals and their families. While most of the trainees have been case managers with the Children with Special Health Care Needs program, staff from the Texas Rehabilitation Commission, the Texas Department of Human Services, private hospitals, and private social-service providers have participated in the training. Participants have been able to earn continuing-education credits in case management or nursing. This will better equip social-service staff to help meet the needs of the more than 381,000 Texans permanently disabled by traumatic brain injury.

A continuing-medical-education seminar on traumatic brain injury targeted to primary-care physicians was delivered in Houston on March 21. This half-day seminar provided four hours of CME credit, including three hours eligible for ethics or professional practice. With an outstanding faculty of physicians from Houston, primary-care physicians were given an opportunity to learn the most current practice in the diagnosis and management of patients with mild to severe traumatic brain injury. *For more information, contact Larry Swift, Traumatic Brain Injury Project, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-3406, or e-mail [larry.swift@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:larry.swift@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Web-based class developed to prevent sexual coercion**

A new web-based distance-education opportunity, “Caring for the Adolescent Patient: Preventing Sexual Coercion,” has been developed for TDH family-planning contractor staff. The password-protected website training takes about one hour to complete and offers credits in continuing education. Passwords are currently being distributed. The site will be updated regularly and will be a source of the most current information in the field. *For more information, contact Mary Chapman McIntosh, Bureau of Women’s Health, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6705, or e-mail [mary.mcintosh@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:mary.mcintosh@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Training held on binational TB card**

Binational TB Project Juntos, Migrant Clinicians Network, and Region 9/10 recently conducted training on the use of a binational TB card. The card lists a U.S.-Mexico toll-free phone number that directs callers to an information database. This pilot-card project will facilitate clinical information exchange for TB patients crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Patient information will ensure treatment completion and prevent the emergence of multidrug-resistant TB strains. *For more information, contact Fernando Gonzalez, Region 9/10, at (915) 834-7773 or e-mail [fernando.gonzalez@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:fernando.gonzalez@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Binational Medical Entomology Workshop set for April 9-11**

The TDH Office of Language Services is working with Office of Border Health and the Microbiological Services Division in the Bureau of Laboratories in final preparation of the Binational Medical Entomology workshop manual in Spanish. Language Services staff will also provide interpretation services during part of the workshop, which will be held April 9-11 in Austin. *For more information, contact Eddie Aurispa, Office of Language Services, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-3405, or e-mail [eddie.aurispa@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:eddie.aurispa@tdh.state.tx.us).*

## **Administration**



### **Proposed legislation would consolidate state agencies**

Two legislative bills have been introduced this session which relate to consolidation of the state’s 11 health and human-services agencies. House Bill 1814, sponsored by Rep. Jim Pitts, R-Waxahachie, proposes consolidation of the 11 agencies into four new agencies, with TDH being combined with the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, the Texas Health Care Information Council, the Cancer Council, and several state boards.

House Bill 2850, sponsored by Rep. Arlene Wohlegemuth, R-Burleson, instead proposes consolidating the 11 agencies into five new agencies, with TDH being combined with the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, and Early Childhood Intervention. Both bills propose consolidation of administrative functions at the Health and Human Services Commission, where they would serve all of the HHS agencies. TDH administrative staff is working with the HHSC on impact statements and fiscal notes related to the consolidation bills. *For more information, contact Gary Bego, Deputy Commissioner for Administration, at (512) 458-7150 or e-mail [gary.bego@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:gary.bego@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **New performance evaluations include standards set by supervisors, employees**

In late August 2002, a Performance Evaluation Steering Committee was formed to address concerns identified in both the Business Practice Evaluation Report (Bomer Report) and in the Survey of Organizational Excellence on the current performance journal system. The committee's goal was to develop a simple evaluation system that provides an accurate reflection of an employee's performance, is an effective mechanism for management to communicate expectations and assess work performed, and is aligned with organizational goals and priorities. The committee's development process included researching performance-evaluation systems used by other agencies and private entities, analyzing best practices for use in the TDH environment, and conducting focus groups with TDH staff. Training for all TDH employees on the new system will take place April through July. Existing performance journals will be closed out in June, and the new evaluation system will begin July 1.

The new system is designed to evaluate performance using job-performance standards and expectations that are universal and can be applied to any work environment. The process begins with the employee and supervisor together developing job-performance standards which are then used along with the universal expectations to evaluate the employee throughout the year. At the end of the evaluation year, the employee completes a self-assessment and discusses that evaluation with his or her supervisor. The supervisor then completes the supervisor's assessment of the employee's performance. Special forms are provided for executive evaluation and temporary-assignment evaluation. *For more information, contact Wanda Thompson, Associateship for Operational Support, at (512) 458-7720 or e-mail [wanda.thompson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:wanda.thompson@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Agency employing strategies to flatten management-to-staff ratios**

The management-to-staff ratio for TDH is currently one manager for every five employees, or 1:5. Senate Bill 645, from 1996, instructed agencies to move towards a 1:11 ratio, and one of the recent e-Texas recommendations from the State Comptroller's Office requires state agencies with more than 100 employees to reduce their ratio to 1:11 by fiscal year 2007. This flattened management requires a change in philosophy because it requires that managers primarily manage, supervisors primarily supervise, and employees complete the assigned tasks. This is a big culture change for TDH, which has historically had primarily "working supervisors."

The Commissioner of Health has directed agency managers to take steps to get to the 1:11 ratio and has asked the Bureau of Human Resources to monitor the situation and work with managers to improve ratios of less than 1:11 in areas that can accommodate

that ratio. Strategies to improve management-to-staff ratios include changing employees from “supervisors” to “team leaders” or “lead workers,” looking at potential changes in the organizational structure, restructuring some jobs by moving the supervisory functions to other supervisory and management positions, creating self-directed work teams with a rotating team leader or project manager, and, through attrition, reassessing the need for supervisory positions. *For more information, contact Wanda Thompson, Associateship for Operational Support, at (512) 458-7720 or e-mail [wanda.thompson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:wanda.thompson@tdh.state.tx.us).*

## **Communications and Campaigns**



### **Crisis emergency and risk communication to be taught via the Internet**

The Office of Communications is working with the agency’s Distance Learning Office to make a course on crisis communication available via the website of the Office of Public Health Practice. The same course was given Feb. 12-13 at the Texas Hospital Association headquarters in Austin by Barbara Reynolds, crisis communication and emergency risk communication specialist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The course includes information on understanding psychological factors, preparing for the first 48 hours of a crisis, working with the media, roles and responsibilities, public health and media law, and developing skills essential as a spokesperson. Participants included hospital communications, marketing and public-relations staff, and public health staff. The course will be placed online by module and will include all handouts, slides, and a book from the original course. *For more information, contact Andrea Littlefield, Office of Communications, at (512) 458-7400 or e-mail [andrea.littlefield@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:andrea.littlefield@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Volunteer interpreters to assist with short-term language needs**

The response to a BlueBoard message posted in March by the Office of Communications entitled “Looking for a Few Good Linguists” brought in replies from nearly 40 TDH employees willing to volunteer as interpreters when different immediate short-term needs arise that can be handled over the telephone. Languages represented in this group of volunteers include Spanish, German, French, Farsi, Korean, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Russian, Urdu, Portuguese, and Swahili. It is believed that the proposed volunteer interpreter project can certainly play a major part in strengthening TDH's commitment and efforts in addressing language services. Now that TDH Austin has such a list of volunteers in its ranks, an Interpreter’s Training Session is being planned for May 19-20 during which language skills will be assessed and the following topics covered: goals of interpreting, the interpreters’ code of ethics, five roles of the interpreter, how to intervene for clarification, memory skills, and note-taking techniques. *For more information, contact Eddie Aurispa, Office of Language Services, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-3405, or e-mail [eddie.aurispa@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:eddie.aurispa@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Thousands download TDH radio broadcasts**

There were 3,196 downloads of MP3 files in February, the format broadcasters prefer, and 616 hits on the audio news-release website. In addition, a 15-minute talk-show interview was scheduled on a Dallas station to talk about the Health Alert Network triggered by the “Speaking of Health” audio news release. *For more information, contact Andrea Morrow, Office of Communications, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6586.*



### **Campaign on early-childhood vaccinations starts April 13**

The Immunization Division will launch its 2003 media campaign on April 13 at the start of National Infant Immunization Week. The campaign will focus on educating parents about the benefits of timely and appropriate early-childhood vaccination. The campaign will include both video and radio spots that will be placed in strategic areas of the state. The ultimate goal is to increase immunization levels among children 2 years old and younger to 90 percent. In 1993, before the Shots Across Texas immunization campaign started, the immunization rate for Texas tots 2 years old and younger was approximately 30 percent; it's 75 percent now. *For more information, contact Lupe Mandujano Garcia, Communication and Training Program, Immunization Division, at (512) 458-7284, ext. 6021, or e-mail [lupe.mandujano@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:lupe.mandujano@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **TDH aids black mayors' challenge to America to buckle up**

TDH staff from the Traffic Safety Program are coordinating and will be participating, along with Houston SAFE KIDS, in a safety-seat checkup event April 26 at the Sharpstown Mall in Houston. (The Traffic Safety Program serves as the Texas State SAFE KIDS Coalition.) This event is shared with the National Conference of Black Mayors and is being called the Mayors' Challenge to Buckle Up America. Car crashes are the number-one killer of minority youth, and this event targets African Americans and Hispanic Americans. In addition to the checkup, there will be live interviews with Houston Mayor Lee P. Brown, local celebrities, and exhibits of the Seat Belt "Convincer." Other participants include the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Houston Police Department. *For more information, contact Susan Warren, Traffic Safety Program, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-2207, or e-mail [susan.warren@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:susan.warren@tdh.state.tx.us).*

## **Program Updates**



### **TDH letter helps doctors encourage breastfeeding in the workplace**

Staff from the Perinatal Health Program and Texas WIC have worked with stakeholder groups to develop a letter for employers that physicians can sign on behalf of their clients who desire to combine work and breastfeeding by pumping their breastmilk in their workplace. The letter was developed as a joint project between TDH, the Texas Medical Association, and a community-based organization called Central Texas Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies, which works to promote breastfeeding. The letter is a form letter that physicians can personalize as they prefer. It is addressed to the client's employer and stresses the benefits of establishing a mother-friendly worksite, or enabling a woman to pump breastmilk during the workday. Benefits to the employer, the employee, and the baby are cited. *For more information, contact Chan McDermott, Bureau of Women's Health, at (512) 458-7796 or e-mail [chan.mcdermott@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:chan.mcdermott@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Birth registrations' efficiency breaks records**

Texas' electronic birth-registration system set a new record in February, when it took an average of only 6.5 days from the birth of an infant until the birth data was received at TDH. This record held true for 25,732 babies, and it eclipsed the previous best one-month average of 7.9 days, set in October 2002. *For more information, contact Steven Elkins, Bureau of Vital Statistics, at (512) 458-7367 or e-mail [steven.elkins@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:steven.elkins@tdh.state.tx.us).*





### Legislature commemorates 40-year compact on regulating nuclear material

On March 1, 1963, in the first agreement between Texas and the federal government since 1845, Texas assumed all licensing and regulatory authority over radioactive materials in the state, with the exception of special nuclear material in excess of a critical mass and radioactive material used by federal agencies. Texas is one of only three states that also has regulatory authority over uranium recovery and low-level radioactive waste disposal. TDH regulates all radioactive material licensees, including uranium recovery licensees, and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality regulates the disposal of low-level radioactive waste. TDH is the lead agency for emergency response planning and response to nuclear accidents. House Concurrent Resolution 20, sponsored by Rep. Warren Chisum, R-Pampa, was passed by both houses of the Legislature on March 11 and later signed by Gov. Perry. It commemorates the 40th anniversary of the agreement and honors the individuals responsible for implementing it.



*Thanks for 40 years  
of Help to the Citizens  
of Texas Warren Chisum*

*Tom Craddick*

The photo above was taken when the resolution was passed. In front, from left, is Arthur Tate, director of Compliance and Inspection in the TDH Bureau of Radiation Control; Richard Ratliff, bureau chief of BRC; and Ruth McBurney, director of Licensing, Registration, and Standards in BRC. In back, from left, is David Lacker, former bureau chief of BRC; Charles Barden, first BRC program director and in charge when agreement signed 40 years ago; Rep. Warren Chisum, HCR 20 sponsor; and Tom Craddick, speaker of the Texas House of Representatives. For more information, contact Richard Ratliff, Bureau of Radiation Control, at (512) 834-6688 or e-mail [richard.ratliff@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:richard.ratliff@tdh.state.tx.us).



### WIC to propose rules to prevent black-market sales of stolen infant formula

Recent briefings by the Texas Department of Public Safety and other local law-enforcement officials has alerted the Texas WIC program to the widespread problem of theft of infant formula. The black-market sale of formula to grocers for resale could pose health hazards caused by tampering with the formula, falsification of labeling to change expiration dates, and storage at improper temperatures. Infant formula is the number-one product stolen from retail stores in Texas. WIC, which is a major purchaser of infant formula because the program buys it for about half the infants in Texas, will propose rules



to the Board of Health requiring WIC-authorized grocers to purchase infant formula only from licensed wholesalers or distributors, or directly from the manufacturer. It is alleged that WIC-authorized grocers are a part of the network of stores purchasing the stolen formula at prices lower than those of most licensed wholesalers and distributors, and the WIC-authorized formula under contract for rebate is the formula stolen most often.

WIC Vendor Operations Division staff are clarifying responsibilities with staff from the Manufactured Foods Division related to monitoring and inspecting WIC authorized grocers. WIC will require grocers to list all distributors from whom they purchase infant formula, and this information will be reviewed for compliance with proposed rules. WIC continues to offer financial support to Bureau of Food and Drug Safety staff to assist them with their investigations. Funds are needed to rent trucks to transport confiscated infant formula, to pay rent on buildings where the confiscated formula is stored, and to hire two full-time employees to investigate thefts of infant formula. *For more information, contact Debbie Brookshire, Bureau of Nutrition Services, at (512) 341-4400, ext. 1-2200#, or e-mail [debbie.brookshire@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:debbie.brookshire@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Webcast on preventing sexual violence set for today**

The Bureau of Women's Health, the HIV/STD Program, and the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault are working together to present a webcast on April 3 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention entitled "Sexual Violence Prevention: Building Leadership and Commitment to Underserved Communities. It will address issues related to rape prevention and education and will provide examples of programs demonstrating key components of a public health approach within specific population-based strategies, introduce a paradigm shift from individual to population-based strategies, inform the audience of disparities within certain racial-ethnic and minority groups, and provide information to everyone with a vested interest in preventing sexual violence. The webcast can serve as a national forum to raise awareness of efforts to target populations with limited access to rape-prevention programs such as American Indians, Asians and Pacific Islanders, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and disabled women. *For more information, contact Mary McIntosh, Bureau of Women's Health, at (512) 458-7796 or e-mail [mary.mcintosh@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:mary.mcintosh@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Professional regulatory exams ensure competence and protect public health**

During January and February, six regulatory examinations developed by TDH were given to ensure minimum competency as a means of protecting public health. The Sanitarian exam and the Code Enforcement exam were held at testing centers, and the Midwifery exam was held at TDH. About 75 candidates took the Fitters and Dispensers of Hearing Instruments exam each month, and about 15 took the Licensed Professional Counselors exam. The two-day Massage Therapy Registration exam was held; it includes a written exam and a videotaped hands-on demonstration of technique. It's offered three times a year; each exam draws in 1,300 to 1,400 candidates. *For more information, contact Jim Zukowski, Division of Professional Licensing and Certification, at (512) 834-6628 or e-mail [jim.zukowski@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:jim.zukowski@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Texas Food Safety Task Force studies 78 recommendations from 'farm to fork'**

The 16-member Texas Food Safety Task Force, composed of representatives from TDH, four local health departments, four regulated industries, USDA, the Food and Drug

Administration, academia, and the Consumer's Union, met in El Paso in January. Its guest speaker was Joe Corby, director of Food Safety for the New York Department of Agriculture and Markets, who described the methods used by New York to regulate the food industry. Many fresh ideas were obtained from his views on food safety.

The Task Force also reviewed 78 recommendations from members for improvements in the Texas food-safety continuum, from "farm to fork." These recommendations, which were directed at each of the areas through which food passes, including the farm, packing sheds, food processing, food warehousing, food transportation, and retail, are being pared down to a workable number, with many stressing the need for increased education and awareness of the causes of foodborne illness, as well as improved training of food handlers and inspectors alike. Some recommendations may ultimately be forwarded to the Board of Health or TDH leadership for action. *For more information, contact Dan Sowards, Manufactured Foods Division, at (512) 719-0243, ext. 427, or e-mail [dan.sowards@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:dan.sowards@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **New guidelines on treating TB would increase costs**

New guidelines for the treatment of tuberculosis were released Feb. 14 by the American Thoracic Society, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Infectious Diseases Society of America. Many of the new recommendations may increase the expense of treating TB patients:

- Completion of therapy is to be measured by doses of medication given rather than by length of therapy.
- Extending treatment to a total of doses equivalent to nine months of treatment is recommended for patients with drug-susceptible pulmonary tuberculosis who have cavitation noted on the initial chest film and who have positive sputum cultures after two months of treatment is completed. (In 2000, a third of the state's 1,238 culture-positive cases had cavitory disease; of these, 48 percent converted from a positive sputum culture to negative within 62 days of treatment.) Without extension of therapy, a significant number of these cases would relapse. This recommendation will result in an increase of current costs but a potential decrease in future costs.
- Laboratory determination of CD4 counts are recommended for HIV-positive patients and, only for those with CD4 counts of less than 100, medication is recommended daily or three times weekly.
- Lab tests for hepatitis B and C are recommended for all TB patients with risk factors for viral hepatitis. Consultation with an expert is recommended for more special situations.
- The number of drugs recommended as available for TB treatment has been expanded. Some of these new medications are more expensive.

At a minimum, these new guidelines will make it necessary to hold some meetings to discuss them, to revise the standing delegation orders, to revise or develop policies, and to revise some TDH forms. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Grants sought for monitoring fish tissue**

Seafood Safety is working on acquiring several grants to conduct fish-tissue monitoring in Texas. One grant for \$150,000 for fiscal years 2004-05 is part of a larger grant that

includes the Texas Commission of Environmental Quality and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. An additional grant for \$100,000 is being explored with the Galveston Bay Estuary Program to provide funding for fish-tissue monitoring in Galveston Bay. Virtually all of the grant funds are used to pay laboratory analytical fees. *For more information, contact Kirk Wiles, Seafood Safety Division, at (512) 719-0215, ext. 329, or e-mail [kirk.wiles@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:kirk.wiles@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Council of Independent Licensing Board Chairs meets**

The Council of Independent Licensing Board Chairs met Feb. 14 to discuss the current Texas budget crisis, the final report from the Health Professions Council relating to complaint procedures and complaint information open to the public, the current status of complaint investigations, and the posting of licensing disciplinary actions. *For more information, contact Debbie Peterson, Professional Licensing and Certification Division, at (512) 834-6628 or e-mail [debbie.peterson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:debbie.peterson@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Global Health Council presentation discusses TB and HIV**

The Global Health Council hosted a presentation titled “When TB and HIV Collide: Texas and Beyond” in Austin on March 18. The purpose of the forum was to describe the impact of tuberculosis in Texas and at the global level, to discuss the impact of HIV/AIDS on the spread of TB, and to highlight the role of existing strategic partnerships focused on combating TB-and-HIV co-infection in Texas and globally. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **World TB Day event educates the public**

The TB Elimination Division hosted a World Tuberculosis Day event on March 24 in Austin at the TDH central office to honor our local partners. There was a display on TB, a presentation on the TDH lobby kiosk, and a message on hold for the TDH phone system during the month of March. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447 or e-mail [charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Clinic site visits being conducted for quality assurance**

The Texas Vaccines for Children Program has about 3,200 clinic sites enrolled. Of these, 1,715 received a quality-assurance site visit during 2002 as required by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which pays for this service with federal funds. During the site visit, providers are educated on national standards of care and are given a TVFC Provider Tool Kit. An assessment is also conducted to determine the level of the clinic’s vaccine coverage. The program’s goal for 2003 is to conduct a quality-assurance site visit in all enrolled clinics. *For more information, contact Jack Sims, Immunization Division, Texas Vaccines for Children Program, at (512) 458-7284 or e-mail [jack.sims@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:jack.sims@tdh.state.tx.us).*

## Regional Updates

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### Public Health Region 1

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#### **Maternal and Child Health survey collects county-by-county data on services**

Maternal and Child Health staff have completed a survey of Region 1 with regard to availability of maternal-health and child-health services county by county so that a current profile for the region by county could be compiled. A statistical package of pertinent information on each county had been put together earlier so that the exchange of information with the county officials and providers would be two-way. This exchange of information was aimed at helping each county or community address identified concerns or risks based on its statistical data. *For more information, contact Jamie Moore, Region 1, at (806) 655-7151 or Sheila Rhodes, Region 1, at (806) 767-0407 or e-mail [jamie.moore@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:jamie.moore@tdh.state.tx.us) or [sheila.rhodes@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:sheila.rhodes@tdh.state.tx.us).*



#### **Low-income kids get free dental care for National Children's Dental Health Month**

The Oral Health Division collaborated with the March of Dimes, the South Plains District Dental Society, and the Covenant Health System to promote children's oral health during February, which was National Children's Dental Health Month. Activities included participation in an area-wide dental-health fair at the Science Spectrum on Feb. 15 during which free oral screenings were provided to children by area dentists. Other activities included oral-health displays, games, and prizes. On the morning of Feb. 21, free dental care was provided by volunteer dentists to low-income children, followed by a free continuing-education presentation for dental professionals and health professionals involved in maternal and child health. The presentation, given by noted speaker Linda C. Niessen, was titled "Healthy Babies, Healthy Mothers, Healthy Smiles." This project was part of the nationwide initiative of the American Dental Association to promote the awareness of the importance of oral health for children and to increase awareness of the need for access to dental care for all children. *For more information, contact Dale Drennan, Region 1 Oral Health Program, at (806) 767-0422 or e-mail [dale.drennan@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:dale.drennan@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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### Public Health Region 4 and 5 North

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#### **Health-care 'vision statement' created by Cherokee County Future Search**

The Cherokee County Future Search was held in Jacksonville March 4-6. Forty-eight individuals attended at least part of the three-day conference, with a daily average attendance of 34 per day. Attendees represented eight different stakeholder groups: faith-based organizations, regulatory/government/law enforcement, education, service organizations, health-care providers in public health, private health-care providers, human-services agencies, and organizations for mental health and disability. Participants created the following vision statement that they believed would help improve the health of the people of Cherokee County: "In order to improve the health of the people in

Cherokee County, the Future Search participants envision the following: a user-friendly health system that meets the needs of people, regardless of economic or cultural barriers; and provides opportunities for community involvement, emphasizing prevention wellness and community health education.” To bring about the envisioned future, 10 project action teams were formed. *For more information, contact Paul McGaha, Region 1, at (903) 533-5264 or e-mail [paul.mcgaha@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:paul.mcgaha@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Public Health Region 6 and 5 South

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### **Epidemiologist to investigate meningococcal infection in teens**

The regional epidemiologist for Region 6/5S, Huai Lin, will serve as the principal investigator in Texas for a project that studies risk factors for invasive meningococcal infection among high-school students. This study is led by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Johns Hopkins University, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Dr. Lin has submitted the revised proposal to the TDH Institutional Review Board for approval, after which he will start to recruit cases and controls according to the protocol. *For more information, contact Huai Lin, Region 6/5S, at (713) 767-3232 or e-mail [huai.lin@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:huai.lin@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Smallpox vaccinations ongoing**

The Region 6/5S smallpox vaccination effort is in full swing. Vaccinations of local public health partners are complete and vaccinations continue for area hospital staff in the counties not served by local health departments. Regional staff will also be providing vaccinations to Disaster Medical Assistance Team members and FBI agents in the area. To date, there have been no serious adverse reactions to the vaccine reported. *For more information, contact Brian Rutherford, Region 6/5S, at (713) 767-3010 or e-mail [brian.rutherford@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:brian.rutherford@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Region 6/5S staffers awarded at special ceremony**

On March 3, a special ceremony was held in the Region 6/5S headquarters to honor those employees who received TDH awards for their accomplishments the prior year. Awards presented included the Team Spirit Award, the Helping Hands Award, and the Health Award, as well as length-of-service awards. An opportunity was also taken during the ceremony to recognize employees' efforts to provide mass vaccinations against meningococcal disease to residents of the Cleveland Independent School District area in January. *For more information, contact Brian Rutherford, Region 6/5S, at (713) 767-3010 or e-mail [brian.rutherford@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:brian.rutherford@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Presentation made to M.D. Anderson Cancer Center Executive Advisory Panel**

On Feb. 21, Region 6/5S director I. Celine Hanson, M.D., presented information about the TDH Cancer Registry program and the Breast and Cervical Cancer Control program to the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center Executive Advisory Council. Her presentation was attended by members of the Texas Academy of Family Physicians, the Texas Academy of Internal Medicine, the Texas Medical Association, the American Cancer Society, the

Harris County Hospital District, the Harris County Medical Society, and the Texas Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition. *For more information, contact Celine Hanson, Region 6/5S, at (713) 767-3019 or e-mail [celine.hanson@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:celine.hanson@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Public Health Region 7

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### **Immunization incentives in Bastrop discussed by focus group**

A focus group on immunizations, consisting of local doctors, school nurses, Head Start staff, and various other community participants, was held in Bastrop on Jan. 28. Several methods were discussed for improving the immunization rate in area newborns and children up to 36 months old. These included incentive programs with local grocers, implementing discharge planning and new-mother education at local hospitals, and including immunizations on a checklist for foster parents. *For more information, contact Lynn Ponsonby, Immunization Division, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2433, or e-mail [lynn.ponsonby@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:lynn.ponsonby@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Focus group's success proven by new weekend immunization clinics**

As a result of a focus group held on April 28, Burnet County now has two new non-traditional immunization providers, Burnet and Marble Falls EMS. Both are now holding regular weekend immunization clinics. *For more information, contact Lynn Ponsonby, Immunization Division, at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2433, or e-mail [lynn.ponsonby@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:lynn.ponsonby@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## Public Health Region 8

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### **TDH in partnership with new Texas Medical Rangers**

TDH representatives were on hand for the activation ceremony for the Medical Reserve Corps' Alamo Regional Group of the Texas State Guard (also known as the Texas Medical Rangers) on March 11. This unit is designed to serve as a model for other health science centers throughout the state and was established in response to President Bush's call for an active Citizen Corps. The Texas State Guard will partner with TDH, the state Division of Emergency Management, and the UT Health Science Center in San Antonio as the unit is established. Members of the Texas Medical Rangers are volunteers who will undergo training to prepare themselves to assist public health authorities in the event that a major natural disaster or man-induced disruption threatens public health anywhere in South Texas. The new organization is already exploring opportunities to collaborate in the near future with Region 8 in upcoming health response exercises. *For more information, contact Chip Riggins, Region 8, at (210) 949-2003 or e-mail [chip.riggings@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:chip.riggings@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Texas Medical Association's annual scientific meeting to include smallpox overview**

The Texas Medical Association's annual scientific meeting, this year called "TexMed 2003" and held April 2-4 in San Antonio, will include a presentation by regional director



Chip Riggins, M.D, on a historical overview of smallpox. Regional staff have been serving as speakers, participants, facilitators, or conveners for several conferences in town, including the Attorney General's conference on Border Terrorism, TDH's West Nile Fever Update held March 31-April 1, and the Texas Public Health Association annual conference scheduled for April 2-4. The CDC's program planner's training for the Strategic National Stockpile (formerly known as the National Pharmaceutical Stockpile) was provided April 2-3 to local representatives from our Regional Emergency Medical Preparedness work group. *For more information, contact Steve Hannemann, Bioterrorism/Emergency Preparedness Team, at (210) 949-2051 or e-mail [steve.hannemann@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:steve.hannemann@tdh.state.tx.us).*



#### **Dr. Cook honored for years of service fighting TB**

Local dignitaries, health-care leaders, and tuberculosis staff from across the region were present on March 17 when Region 8 honored Henry M. Cook, M.D., for his many years of public health service with TDH. As an attending physician at TCID and medical consultant to Region 8, he has traveled throughout the region to assure that TB disease and infection are appropriately treated. *For more information, contact Sandra Morris, TB Elimination Division, at (210) 949-2296 or e-mail [sandra.morris@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:sandra.morris@tdh.state.tx.us)*



#### **'Syndromic surveillance' software systems being considered**

Region 8's Epidemiology Response Team recently coordinated a workshop for local health departments, and TDH suboffices met with vendors of various "syndromic surveillance" software systems. At least three separate products will be piloted and evaluated in the region over the next 18 months. Several hospitals sent infection-control specialists or information-technology specialists to gather information about each system and to determine the best fits for each community. *For more information, contact Trudi Nekemoto, Epidemiology Response Team, at (210) 949-2074 or e-mail [trudi.nekomoto@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:trudi.nekomoto@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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### **Public Health Region 9 and 10**

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#### **Epidemiology Response Team vaccinates 150 against smallpox in Phase I**

The Epidemiology/Emergency program staff has continued to conduct region-wide smallpox-vaccination efforts. A total of 150 public health, hospital, and FBI workers have been vaccinated thus far, during Phase I. Our activities have included training sessions for state and local public health staff, as well as for members of the medical community. *For more information, contact Charles Gaiser, Zoonosis Control, at (915) 834-7782 or e-mail [charles.gaiser@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:charles.gaiser@tdh.state.tx.us).*



#### **Ten Against TB collaborating on curriculum design**

Regional staff co-hosted a Ten Against TB executive meeting to discuss collaboration with the San Francisco Francis J. Curry Center to design training curriculum for public health workers along the border between the United States and Mexico. *For more information, contact Miguel Escobedo, Region 9/10, at (915) 834-7680 or e-mail [miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **World TB Day commemorated at Region 9/10**

World TB day commemorates the discovery of mycobacterium tuberculosis by Robert Koch, M.D., on March 24, 1884. As part of this celebration, the regional office co-sponsored a binational forum to highlight the unveiling of the TB Card Project. National participants for this forum included federal, state, and local leaders and policy makers from the United States and Mexico. Region 9/10 is also co-hosting a TB training seminar for public health workers in Midland and El Paso. *For more information, contact Miguel Escobedo, Region 9/10, at (915) 834-7680 or e-mail [miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us).*

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## **Public Health Region 11**

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### **Commission discusses binational prevention of neural-tube defects**

The U.S.-Mexico Binational Health Commission met in Monterrey, Mexico, on Feb. 5-6. Jorge Trevino from Region 11's Birth Defects Monitoring Division gave a presentation on initiatives to prevent neural-tube defects. He discussed the efforts in Los Dos Laredos, which provides education and folic-acid supplementation in both the United States and Mexico. *For more information, contact Jorge Trevino, Birth Defects Monitoring Division, at (956) 423-0130, ext. 537, or e-mail [jorge.trevino@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:jorge.trevino@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Environmental medical symposium held at request of citizens' group**

At the request of a Corpus Christi group called Citizens for Environmental Justice, the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry held an environmental medical symposium on Feb. 21-22 to teach physicians about environmental medical histories and the toxicological effects of chemicals identified in Nueces County. Regional environmental sanitarian William Ashton attended. *For more information, contact William A. Ashton, Toxic Substance Control Division, at (956) 423-0130, ext. 611, or e-mail [williamsa.ashton@tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:williamsa.ashton@tdh.state.tx.us).*



### **Children's Health Coalition honors efforts to insure children**

The Children's Health Coalition of the Rio Grande Valley hosted a reception in Weslaco on Feb. 26 to honor parent-involvement coordinators from various school districts in Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy counties. The coordinators were praised for their efforts in enrolling eligible children and families in Medicaid and in the Children's Health Insurance Program. Joe Sanchez, mayor of Weslaco, was the keynote speaker, and others spoke on children's health, parent involvement, and covering the uninsured. Children from the Texas Migrant Council Head Start School sang for the attendees. Representatives from numerous health and social-services agencies were on hand to provide information on available programs and services for children and families. TDH Region 11 representatives attending included Albert Ramos from the Office of Minority Health and Alma Alvarez, Veronica Garza, and Belinda Olivo from Texas Health Steps. The Children's Health Coalition is affiliated with the Covering Kids and Families Initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and is sponsored by Migrant Health Promotion, headquartered in Relampago. *For more information, contact Albert Ramos, Office of Minority Health, Region 11, at (956) 661-5364 or e-mail [albert.ramos@exr11.tdh.state.tx.us](mailto:albert.ramos@exr11.tdh.state.tx.us).*